

JLC Position Paper

WOUNDED WARRIOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE

1. **ISSUE:** To provide first class mental health care and rehabilitation for Virginia's Wounded Warriors and their families.
2. **BACKGROUND:**
 - The "problem" of understanding that large numbers of combat veterans are mentally "wounded" is just now starting to be recognized by the medical/military communities as well as the general public.
 - Some funding increases have been recently authorized by Congress; however, DOD and VA remain overwhelmed and will be for the foreseeable future as 100 – 300 are wounded overseas each week.
 - The magnitude of the problem is huge! There is a need for many types of mental health care providers and assistance such as psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, anger management counselors, marriage counselors, substance abuse counselors, spiritual guidance counselors, speech pathologists, vocational training, employment assistance, etc. etc.
 - The Presidential Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors reported symptoms of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and TBI (traumatic brain injury) or other mental health problems in more than 40% of our returning soldiers.
 - A recent article in the Journal of American Medicine states that based on post-deployment health assessments clinicians identified 20.3% of active and 42.4% of reserve component soldiers as requiring mental health treatment. Concerns about interpersonal conflict increased 4-fold. Soldiers frequently reported alcohol concerns, yet very few were referred to alcohol treatment.
 - Veterans from our past wars (Vietnam and Korea) have long ago "fallen through the cracks." They must be included in any veteran mental health care and rehabilitation program.
 - The "problem" is immediate and urgent!
3. **DISCUSSION:**
 - In order to begin to solve this problem we must first recognize how important it is.
 - We must accept that the "solution" is not so much medical/psychiatric as it is managerial and organizational. There are many diverse agencies (Federal & state) as well as private organizations that can and must work together to provide the first class care that our Wounded Warriors deserve.
 - Federal, state, and private resources must be brought to bear on this problem.
 - The problem is too big, too urgent, and too important to be left to some small organization to attempt to do a "pilot project" that is limited in scope and focused on only one small segment of veterans.
 - We do not need another research project or another study. We need action to get as many wounded warriors treated for mental health problems and traumatic brain injuries possible as quickly as possible.
 - Specifically, we recommend that the Commissioner of Veterans Services, in cooperation with the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services and the Department of Rehabilitative Services, establish a program to address the mental health and rehabilitative support needs of Virginia veterans, members of the National Guard and Virginia residents in the U.S. Armed Forces Reserves not in active federal service and their families. The program director must have the authority and resources to get the job done.
 - The program should be located within the DVS (with appropriate resourcing) because: 1) The DVS is totally focused on veterans. 2) The DVS has a state-wide reach with 22 claims offices around the state to help locate, identify, and get the help needed for veterans. 3) The DVS has a large resource of veterans' organizations and knowledge of other non-profit groups that can assist. 4) The DVS has already worked well with other agencies in the state government to foster awareness of veterans' needs.

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- Federal/state/private funding will be required. Initially, we recommend that \$2.9 million of state general funds be appropriated for the establishment of the program. All funds to be controlled by DVS and used for personnel increases, marketing/administrative costs, and to pay for services to veterans and families as needed. Of this amount, \$2 million will be used for the expansion of community mental health and rehabilitation services specifically targeted to address the needs of wounded warriors and their families.
 - Federal and private resources will be sought for the expansion of community services.
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly establish a state-wide program to provide first class mental health treatment and rehabilitative services for PTSD/TBI injuries to our Wounded Warriors and their families. This program must have competent oversight to oversee the efficient utilization of federal/state/private resources.